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CIA Reportedly Drew Plan to Oust Sandinistas

By Robert Parry
Associated Press

Three years ago, as the administration assured Congress that ousting Nicaragua's leftist government was not a U.S. goal, CIA paramilitary officers prepared an ambitious plan to achieve that objective, according to U.S. officials.

One knowledgeable official, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified, said a timetable for overthrowing the Sandinista regime by the end of 1983 was written by senior CIA paramilitary officers in early 1982, shortly after President Reagan authorized start of the covert operation against Nicaragua in December 1981.

"There were always two tracks," said the official—the publicly stated CIA objective of interdicting weapons going from Nicaragua to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas, and the over-

throw of the Sandinista government.

But an administration official said the plan proposing large-scale U.S. backing for the rebels never was approved and was "so absurd everyone laughed at it." He said the plan was only an attempt to show, "in theory, what we could do."

This official, who also demanded anonymity, argued that the CIA's refusal to provide the Nicaraguan rebels with sufficient military supplies to overthrow the government was proof that the administration never intended to oust the Sandinistas.

"It was a nonplan," one official said. "They [the authors] were sent back to the drawing board."

But in his toughest statement of his Nicaraguan policy to date, Reagan said at his news conference Thursday that he is seeking the removal of the Sandinista regime un-

less it brings the rebels into the government and changes its policies.

Denouncing the current government as a "communist, totalitarian state," Reagan urged resumption of U.S. aid to the rebels, whom he called "freedom fighters." A congressional ban on aiding the rebels expires Thursday.

The first official said the timetable was about a half-dozen pages long and set out projected month-by-month growth of the CIA-backed army up to the end of 1983 when the anti-Sandinista rebels were to march into Managua and seize power.

The official said the timetable was placed in a file that contained major policy statements about the covert operation and was shown to key CIA personnel working on Nic-

aragua months after it was written. He added that CIA Director William J. Casey knew of the document.

He said the ouster plan was discarded only when the CIA recognized in the spring of 1983 that the rebels could still not mount a serious challenge to the Sandinista government. He said it then became "clear that [the timetable] was all pie in the sky."

CIA spokesman George Lauder refused comment about the purported timetable.

In secret testimony before congressional oversight committees in 1982, Casey denied that the covert operation was intended to oust the Sandinista government, according to administration and congressional officials.

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FILE ONLY

CIA OFFICERS REPORTEDLY PLOTTED OUSTER OF NICARAGUAN REGIME

BY ROBERT PARRY

WASHINGTON

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One knowledgeable official, who spoke only on condition he not be identified, said a timetable for overthrowing the Sandinista regime by the end of 1983 was written by senior CIA paramilitary officers in early 1982, shortly after President Reagan authorized start of the covert operation against Nicaragua in December 1981.

"There were always two tracks," said the official, one stating the CIA's objective publicly as interdicting weapons going from Nicaragua to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas and the other, the overthrow of the Sandinista government.

But an administration official said the plan proposing large-scale U.S. backing for the rebels was never approved as policy and was "so absurd everyone laughed at it." He said the plan was only an attempt to show "in theory, what we could do."

This official, who also demanded anonymity, argued that the CIA's refusal to provide the Nicaraguan rebels with sufficient military supplies to win the war was proof that the administration never intended to oust the Sandinistas.

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But congressional suspicions about the intent of the covert war continued and became central to the fight over the CIA aid to the rebels. That assistance totaled about \$80 million over 2 1/2 years before being cut off by Congress in 1984 amid a furor over CIA -directed mining of Nicaragua's harbors.

In explaining the covert action, the administration initially insisted it only wanted to stop weapons headed for Salvadoran guerrillas. Later, the goal was broadened to include pressuring the Sandinistas to cut ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union and to live up to promises of an open, democratic system.

In the past, CIA -backed rebel leaders also cited the end of 1983 - the date reportedly used in the timetable - as the target for overthrowing the Sandinistas.

Edgar Chamorro, a former director of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, known by its Spanish initials, FDN, said he was given that date by a CIA officer when the agency persuaded him to join the FDN in late 1982.

Chamorro recalled that the CIA officer said, "we are definitely going to Managua" and "that we would have to do it by July (1983) or by the latest, the end of that year. They (the CIA) didn't want this to be a prolonged war."

The U.S. official, who discussed the timetable, said a CIA officer did meet with Chamorro and other Nicaraguans targeted for recruitment in the fall of 1982 and "told them all these fantasies" about the likely chances of ousting the Sandinistas in about a year.

But other U.S. officials said the CIA officer might have told the Nicaraguans about chances for a quick victory in order to recruit them, without the CIA actually sharing that goal.

The administration official said an overthrow plan was never approved as policy, although adding that a "gung-ho" proposal for a large-scale U.S.-backed paramilitary operation was prepared after a request about the covert war's prospects from then-Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

"It was a non-plan," the official said. "They (the authors) were sent back to the drawing board."

Concerned about the administration's goals, however, Congress approved the Boland Amendment, named after Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass., in December 1982, barring the CIA from spending funds for the purpose of overthrowing the Nicaraguan government.

The House Intelligence Committee charged last year that the CIA's production of a warfare manual for the rebels violated that law. But the administration insists it has obeyed the Boland Amendment.

In an April 14, 1983 news conference, Reagan said, "anything that we're doing is aimed at interdicting these (Salvadoran guerrilla) supply lines and stopping this effort to overthrow the El Salvador government." Asked if he was trying to oust the Sandinistas, the president answered, "No, because that would be violating the law." Robert Parry has covered intelligence activities and Central America issues for The Associated Press since 1981.